

109  
THE  
PEACEABLE  
CHRISTIAN.

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K A

SERMON.

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L O N D O N,

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THE  
PEACEABLE  
CHRISTIAN.

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ROM. 12. 18.

*If it be possible, and as much as lieth in  
you, live peaceably with all men.*

**I**N a World wherein so much evil is both  
done and suffered, wherein all mankind  
are both Agents and Patients in the com-  
mon guilt; nothing is perhaps more difficult  
than to maintain moderate and peaceable re-  
sentments in the midst of such provocations  
as constantly surround us; a quiet, a forgiving  
frame of spirit, being not more necessary to  
the constitution of a good Christian, than it

is hard to be obtained by him. Yet he that belongs to Christ, ought to have his Soul above the common humours of passion and revenge; for as he has learned not to do evil to another, so also not to prosecute it too severely when done against himself. He has learned to shew more displeasure against his own faults, than against those of other men: And in short, is ready to be at peace with any offender, sooner than with his own guilty self. For though the World thinks it a commendable height of courage not to give place to wrath; yet grace by a new method, riseth to a more solid greatness; it overcomes provocations only by forgiving them, and conquers injuries by gentle and moderate returns, whilst instead of tormenting it self in contriving how to carry on any unchristian differences; it makes this rather the business of its holy endeavours, *viz.* That if it be possible, and as much as lieth in it, to live peaceably with all men. Our Apostle at the 9th v. of this excellent Chapter, ingages into a discourse of brotherly love, in pursuance of which he exhorts the believing *Romans* to charity and hospitality towards their poorer brethren, v. 13. and thence proceeds to advise them how to carry it towards an offending Brother

Brother also, viz. that they should bless their persecutors, and that they should not curse even the worst of men, v. 14. but that they should sympathize, and share both in the joys and griefs of all their fellow Christians, v. 15. that they should be humble in their own thoughts, and in their behaviour towards other men, v. 16. being far from returning injury for injury, v. 17. but if it was possible, and as much as lieth in them, that they should live peaceably with all men. For says he, *If it be possible, &c.*

If it be possible---Humane nature is so corrupt, and humane practices are so perverse; that to live altogether peaceably, is look'd upon by the Holy *Paul* as a thing almost impossible; the unkindness of others showing so many injuries upon us, and our own proud hearts, flowing with such streams of bitterness, that the whole world may well be drowned under quarrels, and contentions; and in so universal a deluge, no wonder if the peaceful Dove can find no room to rest its foot amongst men so unkind in their deportment, and so haughty in their passions. Well might the Apostle question the very possibility of living peaceably; lest therefore that we should think

that to do absolutely so, is indeed impossible; we find him descending one degree nearer to humane capacity, if you think that to do this perfectly be impossible;

2. Yet at least, as far as you are able, and as much as lieth in you *live, &c.* For 'tis true, we cannot force the will of our neighbour, it is not in our power to bend his stubborn Soul, to bow his stiff and lofty neck, or to lame his savageness into a more sociable disposition. But though he is not in our power, yet we our selves are: a wise man has command over himself, has power to humble his own pride, to cool his own passions, to chain up his anger, and revenge those wild beasts; which when loose are apt to fly at all; and if we will but keep those poysonous Serpents out of it, we may maintain a paradise in our own bosoms; we may be quiet in the midst of a provoking world. So that if men would but preserve peaceableness in their own proper actions, it would lessen every dissention, by crushing the ill humours whilst in the egg, and by rebating at least the point of the keenest malice; and this would prove one step towards living peaceably with other men.

3. Peaceably, says the Apostle, and in that word  
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*The Peaceable Christian.*

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he commends to us a grace not only going far to the making of a true Christian, but to the making of him happy also. Peace, and good will being those great Blessings, promised by the Angels that proclaimed the birth of our ever blessed Jesus, *Luke 2. 14.* The dearest Legacy bequeathed to his Disciples by their dying Lord, *John 14. 27.* Peace is one of those attributes which adorn the Crown of the Almighty, who is pleased to be stiled the God of Peace; as *Rom. 15. 33. & 16. 20.* In a word, it's one of those blessed circumstances by which his heavenly Kingdom is commended to us. *Rom. 15. 13.* This is that grace so often called for by our Apostle, as that Christians should be at peace amongst themselves, *1 Thes. 5. 13.* And that they should follow peace with all other men too, *Heb. 12. 14.* With all men, being the last circumstance considerable in the Text. Our goodness ought to extend to all mankind, we should live peaceably with all; shewing it by patience towards all, *1 Thes. 5. 14.* By doing good to all, *1. 15.* By being gentle unto all, *2 Tim. 2. 24.* and in fine, by shewing all meekness to all men, *Tit. 3. 2.* With all, then is the great extent of this duty, especially with the household of faith, with those that are shut  
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up in the same inclosure of the Christian Church: but though these have the first title to this peace, yet ought it not to be denied to all the common world besides. Plainly to our goodness the good have a most unquestioned title, and yet even the worst of men should not be excluded from their share in it also. With all mankind, therefore it is our duty to be peaceable. Humane charity should be extended as far as humane nature; and a Christians peace be as universal, as catholick, as his religion: his meekness should be confined in no narrower bounds than those the world it self confesses. *Live peaceably with all men*, with our friends; for the contrary is unnatural, with our professed Enemies, since the contrary is unchristian: we should be quiet with the quiet, because that is but just, and with the unquiet too, because that becomes, our credit and repose: with all, because we owe a duty to all. And thus I have both explained the words in all their parts, and at the same time, I hope sufficiently proved the duty too, from those several parallel Texts already cited.

*Dost.* That therefore, to live peaceably, to be of an universally calm, mild, and forgiving disposition, is the character of every true Christian.



I shall take for granted, and confine my self at present only to examine the duty in the Latitude of the text adding both motives and directions necessary to its performance: we should be peaceable: 1. With all: 2. With all as far as it is possible: 3. With all as much as in us lies. But I shall wave this method, and consider the true extent of the duty, before I prosecute the duty it self, which in the Text has a double limitation: 1. As far as it is possible, and 2. as much as in us lies. And now that I may impose a distinct sense upon both those expressions which, may probably seem to carry the same, I shall take leave to understand the possibility, only for those things that are in our power; and then as much as in us lies, for the things that are lawful, and indeed when we consider that a good man can be rightly said to be able to do only those things that he can lawfully do, perhaps the exposition will not seem very much forced. 1. Then as far as it is possible the Gospel obliges us not to *Limitation* act impossibilities; but in all possible occasions we must keep the Christian Peace. We live *Luk. 17.1.* in an age wherein it is not morally possible to avoid all occasions of offence, we do often such things that others may take in evil part; but

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these things we must labour with all diligence to avoid, briefly it is possible, either not to do ill at all to any one, or at least not to defend it when done; not to justify what possibly we could not avoid.

If therefore out of infirmity of nature, or surprise of the temptaion, we at any time fail in our duties, let us not double our sin, by defending, by prolonging it; nor go on by the continuance of our differences, to shew that we delight in them. If it was not possible to avoid the beginning of quarrels, it is I hope yet possible to make an end of them; and by the sudden taming of our unruly passions, make at least a kind of satisfaction to God and man, both of whom we had offended. Shortly, in all those differences abounding in a contentious world. I fear there are but few can be proved unavoidable in their beginnings, and I am sure there are none impossible to be concluded, did but both parties resolve to do their duties. Let us therefore know that our power goes farther than we are willing to grant it, and that our duty, our peaceableness ought to go as far as our power: which I told you a good Christian will believe to be only as far as it is lawful, that being the 2<sup>d</sup>. Limitation I set to  
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the duty of the Text. Honesty, what is just, and lawful, ought to be the great bound of our charity ; for we are not to agree with all men upon any terms, to agree with any man in his sin ; we ought not so much to study to be at peace with men, as to be at peace with their vices too, and consequently at enmity with God, and at open war with Heaven : we should indeed study to live like brethren, but not like *Simeon*, and *Levy*, brethren in iniquity. Briefly Gen. 49. 5. we ought to quarrel with nothing but sin : nay and there to have a care of being moved against the person, rather than the fault ; to see that our zeal against offence, ingage us not to be unkind, uncharitable, or unnatural against the offender ; for otherwise we may prosecute sin in a sinful manner. We must therefore, if religion will allow it, be peaceable with all men, be kind, and good natured, as far as we can be so with a good conscience ; and I know that very few of our quarrels can be excuse upon a religious, or consciencious pretence ; till therefore we find that Christ suffers as well as we, we should labour to live peaceably with all men. The truth of which in both its extents is sufficiently proved by the places forecited, all with all, and towards all, being the

constant additions to this duty. 1. With our relations according to the flesh, with those friends of ours that are the dear parts of our selves, how unnatural would all disagreement be with them? we find how severely the Apostle speaks of such as fail in their duties to their own house, 1 Tim. 5. 8. Nay Hell it self is not divided within it self, Mat. 12. 26. and certainly such would be thought brutish, and distracted who wound their own bodies, tear their ovvn flesh, and love to be letting forth their ovvn blood; and yet this does every man vvho treats his friends vvith injuries, and despite. 2ly, vve should extend our goodness to strangers too, for some by so doing have entertained Angels, Heb. 13. 2. At least how know we but they may be particular Servants of Jesus Christ. Let us therefore be kind and peaceable with all persons how little soever we are concerned with them, and that whether they be good; or whether they be bad for the good; he that quarrels with them is indeed the Devils Champion, a persecutor of virtue, an Enemy of innocence, and a man so desperately wicked, that it cannot be hoped the short limits of such a discourse should be powerful enough to reclaim him, neither indeed

deed was it designed to such. Therefore,

2. We should, as far as it is lawful, be at peace with those that either are, or we suppose to be bad: for all are not really evil whom we please to think so: with the worst men we should be as peaceable as innocently we may, and with these is indeed the greatest exercise of a Christian's virtue, and therefore to these I shall limit the following part of my discourse, as affording the most difficult part of our duty: For if we love only those that love us, what thanks have we? do not sinners, that is, the vilest of men the same?

*Luke 6. 33.* But now to love our enemies, to do good where there neither has been any foregoing obligation, and from whence in likelihood can be expected no return: To do good for evil, and to answer injuries with acts of charity, and kindness; this is an exaltation of a Christians virtue, and a triumph of that goodness which becomes the followers of the Prince of Peace: Patience towards the froward, forgiveness towards the offending Brother, and, in some, peaceableness with enemies, and enemies that provoke us constantly; these are both a Christians duty, and his honour; and to the doing of this he may be moved.

First,

*The Peaceable Christian.*

First, If he consider how pleasing this must needs be to our good and merciful God, to him who doubtlesly looks down from the Throne of his Holiness, with pleasure and satisfaction upon those who are thus far like himself; for he does good in general to all; he causes his Sun to rise upon the just and unjust, *Luke 6. 35*. He distributes the common blessings of humane life to all indifferently, to his rebels, as well as to his faithful subjects; he is not quick to strike, though he is constantly provoked to it; he revenges not every unkindness with a dreadful quarrel; he silences not the noise of every oath with the louder voice of thunder, nor aims his deadly lightning at the head of every one that offends; should he do so, he would soon lay all nature waste, and fill the whole Earth with the dreadful marks of his displeasure: No! he forbears even the bad, and as thus to our comfort we know that he is peaceable; so for our example, we ought to know it too; and therefore we may be sure that he dislikes all that is so unlike himself, that he abhors those revenges which he never practises, that he hates nothing so much as those unchristian passions, those scandalous resentments of malice and revenge  
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which fall so far short of his divine similitude, that they rather resemble the old Serpent; malice, and that pride from whence it springs, being the poison with which he himself at first burst, and with which he still infects all his followers: but for those who pretend to be the followers of the Lamb of God: They should

2. Consider the great example of the peace-<sup>2 Mot.</sup>ful Jesus; he that received all the ill which the wicked and provoking world was capable of laying upon him, and yet never returned any; but when he was reviled, he reviled not again; and suffered without threatening revenge, *1 Pet. 2. 23.* Nay, that died praying for his murderers, *Luke 23. 34.* He therefore that was so much a Lamb both in his innocence and meekness, will never own such as are Wolves and Tigers; amongst whom there is nothing to be heard but passionate howlings, nor to be seen but rending and tearing each other; whereas to bless those that curse; to love enemies, and to do good to those that hate us, are the principles he went upon, and which he commends to his true *Luk. 6. 27, 28.* Disciples.

3. This peaceableness will be to the honour <sup>3 Mot.</sup>of the Religion we profess; for alas, does not  
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Christianity it self suffer through the miscarriages of its professors! Can that be thought a Gospel of Peace, whose followers delight in nothing but divisions? who will not bear one offence, nor receive one injury without returning it to the full; and it is well if not with interest too: Thus two ill natur'd proverbs are more observed by them, than all the precepts of the holy Gospel, whilst they resolve not to die in the debt of their ill willers, but to give to every one as good as he brings, but does this become Religion? are these haughty and impatient maxims drawn out of the Word of God? is this to glorifie him? and this to adorn his Gospel of peace? as it is called, *Ephes. 6. 15.* by these passions we may perhaps become burning, but never shining lights, persons whom none can satisfie or touch, and whom none can safely imitate. But

4. By unmercifulness in our own practices, we forfeit our title to the Divine mercy, since we cannot with reason hope, that God should deal better with us, than we do with our Brethren, who owe us incomparably less duty, and who affront us infinitely less than we do our God. In our prayers to him we are taught to make this the very condition of our pardon, namely,

namely, our aptitude to forgive a trespassing Brother, *Matth. 6. 12.*

Whilst therefore we our selves are unpeaceable, we make our own forgiveness desperate by denying to forgive others.

5. This ill humour will be to our discredit <sup>5</sup> *Mot.* as well as to our damage ; for there is no reputation like that of being wise and good : but now what wisdom is there in exposing our passionate follies to the discourse of our rattling neighbour ? or what goodness in being exceptions ? in being ready to quarrel upon every affront ; those therefore will certainly practice this pacifick vertue, who stand upon their credit with the wise, or better part of the World ; since such will look with respect and pity upon afflicted patience, and will pay honour to goodness unmoved in the midst of persecutions : whilst the noise of our passions will but awake the censure and reproof of the spectator World, which is apt to subscribe to the opinion of that wise Prince, who tells us, that anger resteth in the bosom of fools, *Eccles. 7. 9.* whereas it is the discretion of a man to defer his anger, and his glory, to pass over transgressions, *Prov. 19. 11.*

6. It is destructive to our inward peace ; for <sup>6</sup> *Mot.* alas, what quiet can there be within ? when

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there is no such noise, and so many disturbances without; a mind possessed with those furies of malice and revenge will find as little rest, as houses do when haunted with disturbing Ghosts; he that entertains these passions, had as good entertain so many Devils, and will find as much in their company; for he laies his soul upon the rack, and finds no rest till he has overcome his enemy, or himself, and which of these is the nobler conquest, let every Christian judg.

7 *Mot.*

7. This peaceful inclination will add to a man's outward quiet also, whereas the contrary shall ingage us in perpetual vexations: Since the quarrellsomeness shall never want some to quarrel with, and the exceptions shall never want occasions; and with the froward the whole World learns frowardness. But if one party at least will resolve to be quiet, the difference cannot certainly be long liv'd: no malice can be so unreasonable as to fight on where it meets with no opposition; and the most violent fires will go out, and die, if you once withdraw their fuel; but on the other side, by disturbing our neighbour's peace, we disturb our own also, since it is almost impossible to keep our own temper whilst we are moving another man's.

*Mot.* 8.

8. This will leave our unreasonable enemies without excuse: those who when we are for

Peace

Peace do yet resolve upon War, as the Royal Psalmist complains of his, *Psa. 120. 7.* our peaceableness will shew where the fault indeed lies, and by the same action we shall both acquit our selves, and condemn them.

9. Which is indeed a motive most Christian; *Mot. 9.* this is the likeliest to reclaim an offending Brother; for how know we but that by our peaceful, patient, and mild behaviour, we may shame our enemies out of all their malice; and by doing so, we may of enemies make them both our servants, and God's too; and so an offending Brother (if you will pardon the expression) shall come to be saved by our mercy, in a sense as well God's, whilst our patience makes a convert of the persecutor, and disarms that malice which would have done infinitely more hurt to it self than to us. And oh the joy! the Christian satisfaction! to see an enemy by our virtue changed into a friend, to see violence disarmed only by our yielding to it. How great! nay how godlike a design it is, to do good to the undeserving, by the conversion of an enemy to dress up Trophies to the honour of our good nature; and to do at once both God and our selves good service; whilst by the efficacy of a good example, we not only overcome evil with *Rom. 12. 21* good, but we do it so as to make the evil good;

which is a work so properly belonging to God, that it must needs be a design worthy the noblest spirit, and becoming the most religious ambition.

*Mot. 10.* 10. By our giving place to wrath, we ingage God in our quarrels; *Vengeance is mine, and I will repay, saies the Lord, Rom. 12. 19.* He will do it, but upon this condition, that we offer not at it our selves; for he may very well forbear to interest himself at all in those quarrels wherein we interest our selves too deeply; and if we prosecute every wrong with too much eagerness, he may justly leave us to our own perhaps impotent and feeble prosecutions: so that the unpeaceable will not give God leave to revenge those evils, which a thousand to one, but after all their fury they themselves will not be able to revenge; but if we could once resolve to trust God with our cause, then would be the time for his indeed appearing in it.

*Mot. 11.* Lastly, The unpeaceable ought to know that they have no enemies which are not of God's raising up; all that provokes us are but instruments in his Almighty hand; our greatest foes are but the Rods of his Justice, which David well considered, when he answered, *It may be the Lord hath said unto Shimei, curse David, 2 Sam. 16.*

10. Let us not therefore by our impatency, like  
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mad Dogs, bite the stones that have been thrown at us; nor like rebellious children, fly at that Rod with which it pleased our Father to give us correction; but let us believe our worst enemies to be God's executors; and therefore like humbled children, let us be ready even to kiss those Rods that made us smart: to forgive, and embrace those men God has made use of for our punishment; being assured of this, that if they mingle their own malice with his Almighty Justice, they themselves shall be called to as severe an account, when God like an indulgent Father may come to break that stick with which he beat us, and to burn those Rods with which he had corrected his repenting, weeping children. As therefore we expect God should own our Cause, let us be exhorted to patience, charity, and forgiveness, even under the greatest provocations: To the doing of which I shall add these following Directions.

*Exhort.*

1. Those who would live peaceably, ought carefully to avoid the giving of all just offence; they ought to make conscience of provoking one another, *Gal. 5. 26.* for to hope for peace where we allow provocations, is too unreasonable.

*Direct. 1.*

2. Upon any offence offered to us, we must  
bridle the first motions of our anger, and curb  
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the first heat of our words. We must not harden our hearts, nor whet our tongues like sharp swords, as *David* words it of his enemies ; for indeed it's no wonder if fire be produc'd by the collision of an Iron tongue, and flinty heart ; sharp words, and obstinate minds, being enough to put whole Societies into a flame.

*Psal.* 64.3.

3. We should not stand upon too nice points, nor ingage into disputes upon every slight occasion ; for certainly that part is not very sound, which seems so tender as not to indure the slightest touch.

4. (For I can but name them) let us put favourable constructions upon doubtful and suspicious passages ; for all is not evil that at first appears to be so ; and it's no sign of good nature to take every thing in the worst sense.

5. We should be willing to debate calmly, and to discourse over those things coolly, which look like injuries ; misunderstanding being commonly one of the greatest make-bates ; those therefore that keep at an unkind distance, do prevent all opportunities of reconciliation.

6. Let every ones ears be stopped against the tale-bearer. Informers generally in every quarrel playing the Devil's game for him, and blowing up the flame on both sides. They being such whisperers that separate very friends,  
*Prov.* 17.9.

7. Use



7. Use all holy endeavours to reclaim thy injurious Brother; conquer him by soft and gentle remonstrances, by friendly concessions rather than by a greater and more furious passion.

8. Resolve to pardon even the most resolved of thy enemies; the worse they are, do thou still labour to appear the better, and make the excess of their ill, only an occasion of heightening thy our vertue.

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9. And with which I shall conclude, Shew thy peaceful disposition by endeavouring peace amongst all other men; by promoting charity and love between all dissenting Christians; to reconcile, to act the Mediatour, is a holy, and a Gospel work; a work that our dearest Saviour thought worthy of his blood and death: This is more charitable than to run with water when your neighbour's house is flaming; more charitable than to pull his child out of the fire into which it is fallen: See not therefore such unkind and such destructive flames, without casting in some charitable drops, some discreet advices, and some good Offices, that so others may find the benefit of thy goodness, and that brotherly love may on all hands continue. Briefly, let us all be perswaded to this duty, and that in the true extent of it. Let no provocations discom-  
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9.

pose our graces ; no injuries disturb the peace of our minds, or tempt us to disturb the peace of other men, and so by a patient, yielding temper, we shall blunt the malice, and disarm the fury of our eager enemies ; and what is more de- rable ? we shall gain God over to our side, and consequently hasten our deliverance : And thus by discharging our duty, we shall obtain peace at the hand of God ; we shall increase peace amongst the Sons of men. In one word, we shall save our own souls, and be instrumental also to the salvation even of those men who would perhaps have undone us. Whilst by the reclaiming of such as injure us, by the converting of our persecutors, we give them good cause to be our friends, who possibly have been our enemies, without any at all. This kind of converting an injurious Brother, is a doing of God's work, is the way to commend our own dear souls to the mercy and goodness of that God, who is pleased with all opportunities of reconciliation ; and in fine, it is to present him with a wandering, a guilty servant, brought back by us unto his duty, at whose conversion Heaven it self will be filled with joy, and all the holy Angels sing.

*FINIS.*

